

To be sawn in two is of great interest. I've never been cut in half before

The enigmatic Sir Jimmy Savile talks for the first time about his quadruple heart by-pass operation

PEEKING out of his low zipped shiny cerise tracksuit top is a 10-inch scar on Sir Jimmy Savile's chest. It's from his quadruple heart by-pass operation that he had only two and a half weeks ago. Just four weeks ago, he saw a consultant who recommended emergency surgery the following morning.

"No, I'll come back next week," replied Sir Jimmy, now talking about it for the first time. "I told them, 'I've got to go to Devon with the Royal Marines and then to Scarborough to put my sister Chrissie away because she just pegged it.'" Chrissie died of a heart attack, as did his mother whom he calls the Duchess. "I've lost lots of them," he says, airily.

Extraordinarily, Sir Jimmy has needed a heart operation for nearly three decades, during which time he has run 208 charity marathons. "I've been on the waiting list for 27 years," he responds in his familiar northern burr, "ever since a consultant attached an ECG to me for research purposes at a charity run and said, 'Stop now, stop now' and I said, 'Sod off.'"

Things became "critical" four years ago. "They campaigned to operate on me then but instinct told me not to. But recently I knew in my heart that things were getting more restricted." He didn't tell anyone he was going into hospital, not even his siblings. "You might as well go in, get filleted and then they hear about it on the news, which they did."

Sir Jimmy, 71, is wearing gallons of aftershave, ludicrous purple reflecting shades, a bracelet that could anchor a boat and a diamond studded Rolex. Flash, eh? "Not really." He has bleached his hair for 35 years, for the sake — canny Yorkshire businessman that he is — of "product recognition". Post operatively is the first time he hasn't worn the massive canvas girdle, which fastens with four straps round



his middle to support his spine and which he has needed since he was blown up, aged 19, in a mining accident.

He reclines in his chair, feet on the table and taking frequent phone calls. He wears his sunglasses throughout, making it impossible to gauge his responses, and a few minutes into the interview his consultant arrives on a social visit and is invited to join us. All this keeps Sir Jimmy in control and avoids intimacy.

We meet in his Leeds penthouse with its cherub lamps and white plastic sofas: everything belonged to the previous resident. "When I bought the flat, I said, 'I'll buy it all, you can take your clothes and pictures and p*** off.'" Didn't he want his own taste? "I haven't got any taste." But his multifarious awards and papal and royal knighthoods are everywhere.

Sir Jimmy has flats also in Scarborough, London and Bournemouth, rooms in Stoke Mandeville and Broadmoor hospitals and caravans in Dorset and Devon. "I acquire the homes as part of business deals. I've slept in the Bournemouth flat for one night in seven years. But I keep a housekeeper to clean it." In Scarborough he retains the clothes of his mother who died 24 years ago. "What's wrong with that? People keep photographs," he says.

On a quick tour of the flat he allows me

to look in his wardrobe. Does he have any skeletons in his closet? It reveals nothing but tracksuits, about 30 of them. "I wear them for three months then give them to charity raffles." He doesn't have a cooker and claims only to eat crisps and biscuits. I open his fridge. Today it's crammed. "Because of my condition, someone bought me chicken legs and chopped liver this morning, me a good Catholic boy."

But back to hospital. When he was admitted he insisted all visitors be banned. "I knew I'd have enough people wanting to say 'hello' inside the hospital." He received 4,000 cards, now itemised by his secretary in a book. In it, under the margin headed 'Clue', is the sender's identity. "Ex stores Broadmoor", "George's Cafe" and so on.

Before he went under the knife, he said to the Lord: "Oi you, wouldn't mind coming out the other side of this." When he awoke in the recovery room, he felt euphoric to be alive. "To be sawn in two is of great personal interest," he quips. "I've never been cut in 'alf before. Afterwards it feels like you've been run over by a 30 ton truck. Now I feel as if I've been hit by a 10-ton truck so I must be 20 tons better."

HE HAD taken his autobiography and another book he wrote, *God'll Fix It*, into hospital, but didn't have time to read them. He was too busy fooling around. "I used to go into the ladies' ward, all in their 70s and 80s, and say, 'Which one of you crept into my room last night?'" Another time he regaled the male patients with a hospital booklet entitled *Guidelines To Sexual Relationships Following Your Heart Attack*.



SMOKE SIGNAL: Sir Jimmy's cheerful grin and trademark cigar show that all is well after his operation, top; his 1991 London Marathon run, above left, was one of more than 200 26-milers; with his mother picking up his OBE for charity work in 1972, right

Main picture: STUART MASON

He has carried hundreds of bodies to the freezer in his voluntary work as a hospital porter, but his life-threatening experience hasn't changed his approach to death. "I didn't have an attitude to it before. I've simply elected not to go." Did he think he might die? "What's the point wasting your time with crap questions like that, that's for the weirdos, is that."

He relights his Havana manfully. "My illness was a hereditary thing. Nothing to do with smoking, hang-gliding or water-skiing." He's now exercising for two hours a day, whereas most manage 10 minutes at his stage of recovery. "I expect to knock 15 minutes off my marathon time."

Sir Jimmy grew up in poverty, left school at 14 and went down the mines for seven years. Amazingly, three years after his serious accident, he became a professional

wrestler and had 107 fights. He hosted Jim'll Fix It and Top Of The Pops for 20 years. In October, he's doing the "slightly disapproving" voiceover on a humorous "teenage TV sex show" called God's Gift.

He acted also as business consultant to multinationals, ran Broadmoor for nearly four years (now he's responsible simply if anyone "wants a pop group there or few quid for a party") and has worked tirelessly for Stoke Mandeville hospital and Leeds Infirmary. At his height, he was earning £500,000 a year. He gives 80 per cent of his income to charity, for which he has raised a staggering £30 million.

But he's odd about money. Ask him about the defining features of his childhood and he replies: "Being skint. It taught me the value of money. You don't ever get around to throwing it away." Yes, he has

owned 17 Rolls Royces, but admits that that was again for "product recognition". He eats in transport cafes and went once on a world cruise and spent £8.50. "The sun's free, the fun's free. What the hell do you want to spend money for?" How much is he worth? "I haven't the faintest," he says. "The accountant said it would cost £800 to work it out."

THE other thing that is curious is his apparent lack of any kind of sex life which over the years has attracted inevitable bouts of speculation. "If you live on your own and you're a single fella, that's not good enough," he explains. "There must be something wrong somewhere."

The truth is, Sir Jimmy is probably not that interested in sex. "Everybody harps on about it. But the majority of people are probably like me and aren't bothered one way or the other. Ninety nine per cent of people couldn't give a monkey's about sex." How long is the longest he has had anyone share his home? "One night, nothing wrong with that, horses for courses."

His only real love attachment was to his mother. "I lived with her most of my life. But I wasn't the number one." He pauses. "We weren't a demonstrative family. We didn't throw our arms round each other and say, 'Oooh I've missed you'. If we did that, we'd call the doctor and say, 'He's having a funny'."

Sir Jimmy likes being famous, but doesn't want constantly to be recognised. So he disguises himself in voluminous coat, huge hat and dark glasses. But then the cabbie driving me back to Leeds station asks: "So how's Mr Wilson? I know that's who you've just seen. That's what Jimmy likes us to call him."

Sir Jimmy is a complex man of many identities. And I didn't get close to finding the real Mr Wilson, either.